

# THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON.

BY H. C. WELLS, THE GREATEST MARVEL-ROMANCER OF THE AGE.

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CHAPTER I.

**We Plan to Visit the Moon.**  
HILL: I was engaged in writing a play at my little bungalow near the Kentish coast first met Cavor.

He was a genius, a crank, what you will. An odd-looking, eccentric little man, who, for some strange reason, took a fancy to me and invited me to his laboratory.

The object of Mr. Cavor's search was a substance that should be "opaque"—he used some other word I have forgotten, but "opaque" conveys the idea—to "all forms of radiant energy." "Radiant energy," he made me understand, was anything like light or heat or those Roentgen rays there was so much talk about a year or so ago, or the electric waves of Marconi, or gravitation. All these things, he said, radiate out from centres and act on bodies at a distance, whence comes the term "radiant energy." Now, almost all substances are opaque to some form or other of radiant energy.

Glass, for example, is transparent to light, but much less so to heat, so that it is useful as a fire-screen, and alum is transparent to light, but blocks heat completely. A solution of iodine in carbon bisulphide, on the other hand, completely blocks light, but is quite transparent to heat.

It will hide a fire from you, but permit all its warmth to reach you. Metals are not only opaque to light and heat, but also to electrical energy, which passes through both iodine solution and glass almost as though they were not interposed.

Now, all known substances are "transparent" to gravitation. You can use screens of various sorts to cut off the light or heat or electrical influence of the sun or the warmth of the earth from anything; you can screen things by metal sheets from Marconi's rays, but nothing will cut off the gravitational attraction of the sun or the gravitational attraction of the earth.

Yet why there should be nothing is hard to say. Cavor did not see why such a substance should not exist, and I certainly could not tell him. I had never thought of such a possibility before. But on the 11th of October, 1895, this incredible substance was made. Oddly enough, it was made at last by accident, when Mr. Cavor least expected it.

He had fused together a number of metals and certain other things—I wish I knew the particulars now—and he had allowed it to cool slowly. The next day he was engaged in his laboratory, and the combination would occur in the stuff sank to a temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit. But it changed, unknown to Cavor, disintegration had begun among the men about the furnace. Gibbs, who had previous seen to this, had suddenly attempted to shift it to the man who had been a welder, on the score that coal was all being dug, and therefore could not

possibly fall within the province of a welder, the man who had been a jobbing gardener, however, that coal was a metallic or ore-like substance, let alone that he was a cook.

But Spargus insisted on Gibbs doing the cooking, seeing that he was a fitter and that coal is notoriously fossil wood. Consequently Gibbs ceased to replenish the furnace, and no one else did so, and Cavor was too much immersed in certain interesting problems concerning a Cavorite flying-machine (neglecting the resistance of the air and one or two other points) to perceive that anything was wrong.

And the premature birth of his invention took place just as he was coming across the field to my bungalow for our afternoon talk and tea.

I remember the occasion with extreme vividness. The water was boiling and everything was prepared and the sound of his "zuzzoo" had brought me out upon the veranda.

His active little finger was black against the autumnal sunset, and to the right the chimneys of his house just rose above a gloriously tinted group of trees. Remoter rose the Wealden hills, faint and blue, while to the left the hazy marsh spread out spacious and serene. And then—

The chimneys jerked heavenward, shattering into a string of bricks as they rose, and the roof and a miscellany of furniture followed. Then overtaking them came a huge white flame. The trees about the building away and whirled and tore themselves to pieces that sprang toward the flame.

I took three steps from the veranda toward Cavor's house, and even as I did so came the wind.

Instantly my conceptions were over my head, and I was progressing in great leaps and bounds, and quite against my will, toward him. In the same moment the disintegrator was seized, whirled about and shot through the screaming air.

I saw one of my chimney-pots hit the ground within six yards of me, leap a score of feet, and so hurry in great strides toward the focus of the disturbance. Cavor, kicking and tripping, came down again, rolled over and over on the

ground for a space, struggled up, and was lifted and borne forward at an enormous velocity, vanishing at last among the laboring, lashing trees that writhed about his house.

A mass of smoke and ashes and a square of bluish, shining substance rushed up toward the zenith.

A large fragment of fencing came sailing past me, dropped edgewise, hit the ground and fell flat, and then the worst was over. The aerial commotion had swiftly until it was a mere strong echo, and I became once more aware that I had breath and feet. By leaning back against the wall I managed to stop, and could collect such wisps as still remained to me.

It had instant the whole face of the world had changed.

The tranquil sunset had vanished, the sky was dark with scurrying clouds, everything was flattened and swaying with the gale. I glanced back to see if my bungalow was still, in a general way, standing, then staggered forward toward the trees among which Cavor had vanished and through whose tall and leaf-dented branches shone the flames of his burning house.

I entered the copse, dashing from one tree to another and clinging to them, and for a space I sought him in vain.

Then, amidst a heap of smashed branches and fencing that had banked itself against a portion of his garden wall, I perceived something stir.

I made a run for this, but before I reached it a brown object separated itself, rose on two muddy legs and pro-

ceeded to crawl toward me. It was a small, round, black object, about the size of a cricket ball, and it moved with a swiftness that was almost incredible.

"Try and get back to my bungalow!" I bawled in his ear. He did not hear me, and shouted something about "three martyrs—science—and also something about 'not much good'."

At the time he uttered the last words, I saw three men in the air, and I saw them fall. Directly he had left for my bungalow they had come off to the public-house in Lymington to discuss the question of the furnaces over some trivial refreshment. I repeated my suggestion of getting

back to my bungalow, and this time he understood. We dug arm in arm and started, and managed at last to reach the shelter of as much roof as was left to me. For a space we sat in arm-chairs and panted. All the windows were broken and the lighter articles of furniture were in great disorder, but no irreparable damage was done. Happily, the kitchen door had stood the pressure open, so that all my crockery and cooking materials had survived. The olive-stove was still burning, and I put on the water to boil again for tea. And this prepared, I could turn on Cavor for his explanation.

"Quite correct," he insisted. "Quite correct. I've done it, and it's all right."

"That," I protested. "All right. Why, then, can't be a sick standing, or a fence or a thatched roof undamaged for twenty miles around."

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